

A LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



To most Americans, even the majority who are born and raised in cities and large towns, there is a heart-tugging appeal about the countryside. As an image of America, it rests deeply in the national psyche, even of people whose families were never part of frontier or agricultural life. The Pastoral Ideal was an important element in early 18th-century American literature and philosophy and, as the United States began to grow to continental size, strongly identified frontier or rural life as the embodiment of an independent, self-reliant New American. Today, long after the close of the American frontier in the 1890s and accelerating urbanization in the 20th century, Americans cling to a nostalgia for a less complex, slower paced life that is closer to nature and to more traditional values.

This vision of the American “heartland” lives on today, as the many people still not living in urban areas sustain and reinterpret the meaning of contemporary rural life, particularly as new technologies have enabled them to work and communicate from anywhere at all.

Leading SPAN’s cover package of stories, “Heartland Rock” by Peter Eisenhauer explores the musical expression of these feelings of pride in the down-to-earth lifestyle, despite difficulties and frustrations. We also invite you to go to SPAN’s Web site, where you’ll find a link to an example of this music, “Small Town” by Indiana rocker John Mellencamp. Joseph Hart’s article, “Just a Small-Town Boy,” details a phenomenon in the United States called “the rural rebound,” in which city-dwellers are moving to smaller towns and rural areas. “Farmers’ Markets,” Sebastian John explains, are part of this “back to the land, back to more genuineness” movement in urban areas. And Neenah Ellis reminds us that “One-Room Schools” are part of America’s heritage and are still in use in rural areas, just as in India.

Our second group of stories is about health, a topic of concern to Americans and Indians alike. In “Spice Healer,” Gary Stix tells of the research into medicinal uses of India’s turmeric plant. It was just such innovative research that led to Dr. Jonas Salk developing the polio vaccine, ending Americans’ fear of children being crippled and killed by this disease. Lisa A. Swenarski de Herrera tells how it came about and looks into the very real hope that this disease can be eliminated in India, too.

We also present personal stories from two people who have overcome disease and are determined to help others: Jeannie Mulford, the wife of the U.S. Ambassador to India, explains how early detection helped her survive breast cancer; while Urdu SPAN Editor Anjum Naim recounts being stricken with polio as a child because his parents did not know about the preventive vaccine.

Wishing you well,